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ABSTRACT

This book explores how people look at workplaces and the consequences for one's understanding of work. Chapter 1 discusses the rhetoric of skill requirements. Chapter 2 follows the attempt of Kramden Computers to provide training to reduce problems in workmanship and the program's failure due to the inadequacy of the skill concept. Chapter 3 reviews literature on practical reasoning, situated cognition, activity theory, and practice theory that provides a basis for an alternative view of work. This view informed the ethnographic fieldwork conducted in a second site, Calhoun Wire and Cable Company, which the remainder of the book describes. Chapter 4 explores the naive realism of viewing workplaces as natural objects that observers can easily describe. Chapter 5 presents extensive descriptions of the practices related to running machines to "make product." Chapter 6 explores how perceived changes in competition have resulted in increased paperwork, meetings, and projects to alter production floor practices. Chapter 7 analyzes how the production floor is structured as a community of practitioners, how newcomers enter it, and how the community shapes the learning that occurs. Chapter 8 analyzes trends affecting production work. Chapter 9 visits NewSite, Calhoun's "factory of the future," to see how changes in the workplace have affected production work. Characteristics are discussed that seem to affect learning in the workplaces. Appendixes contains notes, 105 references, and an index. (YLB)

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